DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 180 893 SO 012 273

AUTHOR Weibust, Patricia S.
TITLE Stirring the American Cultural Stew: Developing and Implementing Ethnic Curricula in Connecticut.
PUB DATE [80]
NOTE 13p.

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrator Characteristics; Administrator Role; *Curriculum Development; Educational Problems; Elementary Secondary Education; Ethnic Groups; *Ethnic Studies; Instructional Aids; Instructional Materials; Personnel Selection; Program Content; Program Descriptions; Program Development; Research Problems; *State Programs; Teacher Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This paper identifies issues which arose during the development of an ethnic studies curriculum project in Connecticut. It also defines the author's role as an educational anthropologist involved in the project. Initiated in 1974, the "Peoples of Connecticut" project involved research on ethnic groups in the state and promotion of curricula to study the groups in the public schools. Among the groups examined were Armenians, Irish, Italians, Jews, Puerto Ricans, Scotch and Scotch Irish, Poles, Blacks, and American Indians. Research studies on six groups, a teacher's manual, study aids, and audiovisual materials have already been produced. Among the issues encountered by project personnel were (1) how to define an ethnic group, (2) appropriate subject matter for ethnic curricula, (3) sensitivity toward certain types of information such as sexual activities and attitudes, (4) how to handle data on unpleasant subjects such as crime, warfare, and prejudices, (5) who should participate in research, curriculum development, and teaching of ethnic studies, and (6) most appropriate strategies for studying ethnic groups. The author found her role to be multi-faceted, including that of educational anthropologist, public relations representative, fund raiser, team member, guest teacher, arbitrator of disputes, critic, and university professor. She outlines 11 skills which she needed to perform her role, and describes four major frustrations which she encountered in working with so many groups in so many roles. (AV)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED180893

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Patricia S. Weibust
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

Stirring the American Cultural Stew: Developing and Implementing Ethnic Curricula in Connecticut

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

Patricia S. Weibust

University of Connecticut

SO 012 273

As the United States has passed its bicentennial, it is clear that the old generalized melting pot image of American culture is giving way to a more precise analogy of the American cultural stew (Weibust). It has taken several decades of distance from the periods of heaviest immigration for us to realize that the ideal of undifferentiated blending, a puree if you will, is not conceptually adequate to describe the realities. For what we have instead is a common gravy, representing a sizeable proportion of our population, who regard themselves as Americans with little sense of any ethnic affiliation. At the same time we have those who recognize that along with American seasonings, there are also important distinctive socio-cultural elements which they share with a group. These latter peoples are hyphenated Americans and they constitute the carrots, the potatoes, the onions and the meats which retain a distinguishable appearance and flavor despite lengthy simmering.

At the University of Connecticut, a group of us have had the opportunity to stir the American cultural stew and this paper is an attempt to describe our work and more specifically, my role in it as an educational anthropologist.

Description of the Project

Following some intensive preliminary involvement, in 1974 an interdisciplinary team from the University of Connecticut was awarded a grant from the U.S. Office of Education, H.E.W., for the "Peoples of Connecticut Project". Subsequently additional support has been derived from a variety of sources: a Connecticut-based insurance company has agreed to publish our studies; and monies have been received from agencies of the State of Connecticut, the Associated Schools Project of U.N.E.S.C.O., the Armenian Relief Society, the Jewish Federation of Greater Hartford, and the University of Connecticut Research Foundation.

Basically the "Peoples of Connecticut" is an undertaking designed to accomplish research on ethnic groups in the state and to promote study of these groups in our schools. The various subtasks were originally allocated along disciplinary territorial lines: oral histories were the province of the historians; sociologists planned the archives, embarked upon small group studies and assembled demographic data; and the educators conducted ethnographic investigations, wrote and disseminated the curricula, and have begun evaluation with public school teachers. General direction for the "Peoples of Connecticut" was to have been provided by a statewide Advisory Board, composed of volunteer citizens who are active in and knowledgeable about ethnic affairs, and we were to have had the co-operation of two major school systems. In fact, the participation of the Board and these school systems atrophied over time and have been functionally replaced.

To date, the educational arm of the team has accomplished the production of a teachers' manual and six studies (Armenian, Irish, Italian, Jewish, Puerto Rican, and Scotch and Scotch Irish). The publication of five others (Polish, Black, a second volume on the Scots, American Indian and Chinese) is imminent, and there are several under study (Norwegian, French Canadian, Estonian and German). Each curriculum has a sample artifact box containing hands-on type of study aids and audio-visuals such as records, tapes and slides of the parent culture and of the ethnic group in Connecticut. The materials are in use in more than twenty schools and have been widely purchased by libraries, colleges, teacher centers, ethnic organizations and private citizens.

Each ethnic study has followed a roughly prescribed procedure. The principle investigator/s gathers data on the parent culture, the ethnic group in the United States and in Connecticut by searching the literature, by reference to oral histories, by indirect/direct interviews and by participant-observation. Pictures are collected and artifacts assembled. The time frame is usually one to two years, which is obviously inadequate, given an ethnic group of any substantial size and given the paucity of research. However, the time frame is a pragmatic accommodation to the demands of the task we have set for ourselves. A rough draft of the study is prepared and submitted to a panel of from five to seven readers who are educators belonging to the ethnic group being studied. Revisions are effected in light of their comments and the pilot edition is published, always with the proviso that suggestions for changes are welcome.

The evaluation of the materials in 1977-78 was approached in a highly inductive way. We held a meeting at which the curricula were distributed and the artifact boxes were demonstrated. Each of the fifteen teachers was asked to adapt the materials to her own unique situation, to keep a record of what she and her students did, how she assessed their accomplishments and lastly how she and/or her students critiqued the curricula. We visited each participating class at least once, and at the end of the year arranged for all of the teachers to get together to exchange ideas.

Issues

A number of potentially explosive issues have arisen in the process of the "Peoples of Connecticut Project". From the standpoint of an educational anthropologist, they are particularly interesting and yet frustrating since they raise questions with strong anthropological parameters which still remain enigmas to the anthropological world. All of the issues have been aired in the teachers' manual. In some instances, other steps have been taken toward resolution and these will be mentioned in the following discussion of each issue.

What is an Ethnic Group?

A rather fundamental recurrent question is how to define an ethnic group. A lack of conceptual concensus is certainly not uncommon in the social sciences, but in the case of ethnic studies, it assumes a distinctive plurality since people with such diverse backgrounds are working together. The confusion which results from the persistence of a multitude of definitions is not confined to those of us who delight in ivory tower intellectual debate. Rather, it creates problems at the applied level as well.

The three major conceptual clusters which we have encountered can be aptly described according to Hall's tripartite division (1959). Those inclined toward a formalistic bio-national idea of ethnic groups have difficulty classifying Jews, Blacks, women and American Indians. And some operating under a technical framework find that they lack a basis for clearly differentiating between socio-cultural groups which can be dubbed ethnic and those which cannot. Informal definitional oddities spring up at unexpected moments to further complicate matters. To cite one example, a high school teacher wrote the following statement about the ethnic composition of his town,

> Presently, several generations of more than fifteen ethnic groups live and work side by side along with native American, Black, Oriental and Yankee groups in cultural harmony.

What Should Be Included in an Ethnic Curriculum?

In addition to selection of groups to be studied, we stumbled upon the conundrum of choosing appropriate subject matter. Ideally, the broad topics ought to be the same for all groups so that comparisons can be explored, but the lack of a clearcut definition of "ethnic group" obscured derivation of a single outline to be treated. Although partially remedied by discussions among investigators, we never really agreed upon a set of common topics.

Another aspect to this issue is sensitivity toward certain types of information. Objections were raised about reference to sexual activities, attitudes toward sex, and jokes or gestures with sexual content. While it might be argued that a curriculum about any ethnic group which totally excludes sexual data is sterilized by failure to mention this essential human activity, it is perhaps understandable that those who are in a brokerage position of introducing the curricula to the public, are cautious about including material which is not universally accepted as a proper or necessary component in the public education of our children. We deleted the most controversial material, which left some more subtle and less explicit references.

A second delicate area has been the little tradition (Redfield). Although in the classical conception of the great and little traditions, there may be no value connotation implied by these terms, members of ethnic communities were offended by inclusion of rich components of their little tradition. We reworded a bit but did not delete the little tradition as it was felt that this is part of the learning process as ethnic curricula are fashioned and initiated in the schools, for if only great traditions are thought to be worthy of study, we will further perpetrate some time-honored mythological stereotypes.

Another sensitive area has to do with how unpleasant or unsavory data is handled. What if anything should be said about crime, warfare, and inter or intra ethnic prejudices and rivalries. Feelings have run strongly on both sides of this issue. We have adopted the position of uniformly covering warfare and prejudice since we seem to be able to locate adequate literature dealing with these blights on the human condition, but have left out crime since there is no reasonable way of securing valid information.

The last subissue here dovetails with the definitional one, but has been couched in and reacted to as a content controversy. Certain factions within groups have insisted that their interpretation be adopted as that of the entire group. Specifically, in the Jewish study, a religious element wanted religion to be treated as a sine qua non, and in the Puerto Rican study a small group of Marxist Puerto Ricans were quite adament that we write the history of their island from a Marxist perspective. Encounters with these factions included communication of hostilities in the press, in correspondence and in face-to-face meetings. In one instance a mediator was called in to effect a solution at an emotionally ladden meeting. There were even threats to attempt to cut off some of our sources of funding. We did cover all significant factions in our studies but not as dominant since our research indicated otherwise.

Who Should Be Involved in Ethnic Studies?

A third major issue has been the question of who should participate in the research, the curriculum development and the teaching of ethnic studies, as well as the corollary, who the designated student population should be. There has not been any perplexity about occupational specializations for expectations have tallied closely with the realities. And there has not been any reaction expressed about an optional age for students to learn about ethnic groups, aside from recognition of necessary differences in the degree of sophistication according to grade level.

The real issue has to do with ethnicity. There have been many who thought that the best people to be involved are the appropriate specialists who are also members of the ethnic group under study. While there are cogent arguments about the relative merits of outsiders and insiders, and research is underway into related problems, in actuality

rational evidence is not sufficient, for there is a deeply entrenched affective factor (Trice; Blum). There are many who treat an insider, teacher or researcher or student, as far more credible than any outsider. In some groups, we have met skepticism to active opposition toward outsiders affecting any understanding of their culture. We have anticipated this problem in some cases and have reacted to brushfires in others by: selecting investigators who are insiders or are related to insiders; setting up a research team which includes insiders; nominally picking an insider as collaborator after the study was finished; and when no qualified insider was available and/or no threat was perceived by the group, an outsider was chosen to be the researcher.

As far as student ethnicity is concerned, there has been disagreement about whether the same curriculum is appropriate for both outsider and insider children. Some have thought that pupils of a particular ethnicity are already acquainted with their culture and should therefore either not be bothering with this study or else should be offered a more advanced one. Others have felt that insider children are far more ignorant about their own ethnicity than is generally assumed and that all students could benefit from the same curriculum. Particular concern has been expressed about an outsider teacher trying to help a class of insider children learn about their own ethnicity.

What Are the Most Effective Strategies for Studying Ethnic Groups?

This is perhaps the most crucial issue to be addressed for despite a thorough accumulation of information and artifacts, in the final analysis the critical test of the effectiveness of a curriculum comes at the point where teachers and students interface. And we know too little about the optimal conditions for learning about cultures.

A number of teachers have come to recognize a need for help in teaching their students how to conduct oral histories, interview informants, participate and observe in ethnic groups. So far no issues have surfaced in this regard. However, there has been one broad area of debate and this is how to deal with the thorny problem of valuation (Snyder). Should a teacher pass on to her class, value judgements as to whether one group or socio-cultural aspects of a group are better than others? If so, what are valid criteria for making such judgements? By way of a naturalistic analogy, I should like to report the following strategies used by teachers (and some anthropologists too, I might add).

1) <u>The Way of the Puppy Dog</u> - The puppy dog approach is the decision to study the "facts" about each group without passing judgement. Just as the puppy dog bounces around indiscriminately to greet each stranger, the culturally relativist teacher greets each new ethnic group with equal friendly enthusiasm. This "to each her own" stance helps to avoid a rush to judgement and the early formation of unfounded prejudices but makes it awkward to deal with some very real offensive socio-cultural phenomenon.

2) The Way of the Crow - The crow approach is a popular one in which those aspect of ethnic life which appear to be exotic or quaint or very traditional are selected to represent these people. Just as the crow is attracted to showy bright shining objects, the ringmaster teacher casts about the world of ethnicity for the unusual to enliven her class. This showmanship can create an atmosphere of fun and excitement but it can also contribute to the creation of false stereotypes as it ignores the more drab subtle differences and the common denominators of humanity.

3) The Way of the Collie - The collie approach is one of interest in exploring ethnic groups with the predetermined conclusion that "there's no place like home". As the collie roams to investigate neighboring lands but is never fully content unless she can return to her home hearth, so the ethnocentric teacher directs the study of ethnicity so that students will arrive at the conclusion that the best of all possible worlds is in their own cultural milieu, whether this be a specific ethnic one or a more broadly conceived American one. There is something very secure in this determination but students may well be left in ignorance of the unmistakable brilliances of others.

4) The Way of the Bee - The bee approach is best summarized by the notion that hard work is good, hard work results in production and that groups can be valued by their G.N.P. Just as the bee regards honey production as its highest calling, the developmental teacher regards production as mankind's end-all and be-all. This is a more scientific version of ethnocentrism which accurately represents ideals of most nations, but it can seriously mar ethnic studies by ignoring or disparaging those elements which are nonproductive and its adequacy can be easily questioned by any student bright-eyed enough to note current global crises which have resulted from the dominant social philosophy of modernization.

5) The Way of the Ant - The ant approach views the good life in a synergistic way, a merging of the selfish and the unselfish. Those groups are superior in which the individual can satisfy her own needs and at the same time be seen as contributing to a social unit. Just as the ant considers its own fulfillment as synonymous with the survival of its hillmates, the synergistically oriented teacher apprises humans' highest manifestation to be possible only when individual and group needs are harmonious. Using this approach, a teacher may instill a more humanistic basis for judging groups, yet find it a fuzzy yardstick to employ and run the risk of eulogizing about happy natives playing with coconuts on white sandy beaches.

Analysis of Role and Skills Required

As our project has progressed over time and I have interacted with different groups of participants, my role has varied. The most important dimensions have been: educational anthropologist, public relations representative, fund-raiser, team member, guest teacher, former public school teacher, arbitrator of disputes, various personal ascribed charact-

eristics, critic and university professor.

While initially I reveled in ethnographic work among Italian-Americans in the state, it soon became apparent that my role was infinitely more complex.

To colleagues at the university, I was regarded as an educational anthropologist (whatever that means?) with all of the strengths and weaknesses projected upon those in cross-disciplinary fields. In addition, I have been expected to represent the project at assorted public gatherings, help to raise further monies and cooperate with others on our team.

As I engaged in fieldwork, other dimensions of my role assumed a greater import. Being a university professor afforded me a certain status of respectability, reliability and credability, but in the last analysis it was the personal aspects which locked or unlocked doors. For example, it would be extremely problematic that a woman could conduct a valid study of Italian-American men's clubs. On the other hand, through a network of friends, relatives, students and neighbors, I gained entryinto abundant data. Crosscutting through my interaction with university colleagues and ethnics was the anticipation that I would act as an arbitrator of disputes over some of the issues already mentioned.

I found that in working with teachers, other aspects to my role emerged. The most crucial one was that of being a former teacher, as this seemed to create a sense of trust that I would understand and be less critical of their efforts. I was also expected to be a "guest teacher" in some classrooms and am increasingly being regarded as a professor whose expertise might be useful. The final parameter to my role has been that of a critic, and this crosscut all three groups.

As far as the skills required to perform this multi-faceted role, I would enumerate the following:

1) speak enthusiastically and coherently about the project to various groups, gearing the presentation to their specific interests;
2) discuss the project with funding sources and write grant proposals;
3) act in a supportative way toward other team members;
4) conduct my own ethnographic research, but do not tell others how to do theirs;
5) when asked, help teachers and students to do ethnic studies in a limited amount of time;
6) write curricula and collect artifacts which will be useful to teachers;
7) support teachers in their efforts to include ethnic studies and to apply for grants;
8) arbitrate disputes which arise within ethnic groups or between ethnic factions and the university team;
9) interact with others in a responsible personal interchange;
10) critique my own and others' work;
11) appear as a credible member of a university faculty.

Role Abstraction

To render an emic or substantive abstraction from the numerous fragments which have comprised my role as an educational anthropologist involved with ethnic studies, I should like to single out one theme which I believe is important in applied anthropology. It is what I would call "educative anthropology". As with any true education, it is a flow of ideas and more specifically means the facilitation of socio-cultural osmosis among the domains of anthropology, education, other disciplines at the university and ethnic groups.

We have attempted to do this in a number of ways: by offering some anthropological perspective in speeches, workshops and informal conversations; by designing our first evaluation with teachers in a highly inductive way; by relying upon an ethnic educator panel to review the rough drafts of our curricula and by utilizing ethnic investigators whenever possible; by writing a teachers' manual with concepts and issues gently spelled out in anthropological terms; by offering courses on ethnography, ethnology and ethnic studies for educators; by advising graduate students engaged in ethnographic research; by founding a State Chapter of the World Education Fellowship, an international organization devoted to intercultural education; and by establishing the I. N. Thut Center for Multicultural Studies at the University of Connecticut.

Over time and with persistence these various attempts do appear to be improving the diffusion of ideas among those worlds. However, there have been frustrations and I should like to mention four major ones which have a direct bearing upon the educative functioning of my role. First has been the need to overcome my aversion to incomplete ethnographic research, which Pelto refers to as "quick and dirty" (1978). If we adequately study ethnic groups in Connecticut, it will be well into the end of this century before complete reports can be made available to public schools. What we have done instead is to rely upon shortcuts, some less odious than others. A very useful study might be to compile and evaluate such shortcuts. Another area of stress has been the necessity to steel myself to tolerate and to peck away at the proclivity of educators to outscience the scientists, to regard deductive quantitative research as the sole legitimate means for acquiring valid and reliable data. And a third major obstacle has been facing up to and dealing with the defensive superiority affected by social scientists toward those affiliated with education (Wolcott; Smith; Hood; Comitas; ASCP). This point deserves considerable emphasis as it makes the job of educative anthropology very difficult. The fourth and last frustration has been the necessity for developing credibility in a number of discrete domains. While the variety of opportunities has been rich and energizing,the demands for satisfying membership requirements have been debilitating.

Abstraction of my role to an etic or formal level, leads to a review of literature on "boundary spanning roles", where we find that such roles may be associated with stress, marginality, role conflict and role anbiguity (Tushman, Keller, Aldrich, Schensul, Pelto, et al.). From my experiences, I would certainly recognize the presence of stress and marginality, but am not aware of role conflict or ambiguity.

A few final comments can be added on the process of boundary spanning. One aspect is the recruitment of boundary spanners which we have accomplished by identifying others who already possess great permeability, the "thin-skinned people", and by creating situations which call for interchange and then purposively holding back so that others will initiate interaction. The second aspect has to do with language, which is a factor in the degree of permeability. We have coined some analogies which translate very specialized jargon into a more common vernacular, appealing to a broader world which is shared by all domains. Apparently, analogies can be cutsy, catchy or creative enough to be interesting, amusing or memorable and they are sufficiently nonthreatening so as to be more readily absorbed than straight-on types of information.

REFERENCES

Aldrich, Howard and Diane Herker., 1977, "Boundary Spanning Roles and Organizational Structure." Academy of Management Review 2: 217-230.

Anthropology Curriculum Study Project., 1972, Two-Way Mirror, Anthropologists and Educators Observe Themselves and Each Other. Washington D. C.: American Anthropological Association.

Blum, Fred., 1970, "Getting Individuals to Give Information to the Outsider." In William Filstead, ed., Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement With the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co.

Burdette, Barbara in collaboration with Francisco Echevarria., 1976, The Puerto Ricans: On the Island, On the Mainland, In Connecticut. Storrs, Ct.: Parousia Press.

Center for New Schools., 1974, "The Use of Ethnography in Educational Evaluation". Chicago: Unpublished report.

Comitas, Lambros and Janet Dolgin., 1978, "On Anthropology and Education: Retrospect and Prospect." Anthropology and Education Quarterly 9(3): 165-180.

Glasser, Barney and Anselm Strauss., 1967, The Discovery of Grounded Theory. Chicago: Aldine.

Gould, Sally., 1977, The Jews: Their Origins, In America, In Connecticut. Storrs, Ct.: Parousia Press.

Hall, Edward., 1959, The Silent Language. Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett.

Hood, Bruce., 1969, "The Historian of Education: Some Notes on His Role." History of Education Quarterly 9(3): 372-393.

Keller, Robert and Winford Holland., 1975, "Boundary Spanning Roles in a Research and Development Organization: An Empirical Investigation." Academy of Management Journal 18(2): 388-393.

Pelto, Pertti and Gretel Pelto., 1978, Anthropological Research, The Structure of Inquiry. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Redfield, Robert., 1956, The Little Community and Peasant Society and Culture. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Schensul, J., P. Pelto, et al., 1977, "The Linkage Coordinator: Key Role in the Placement Process. Final Report to Nero and Assoc., Inc. and the Bureau of Education for the Handicapped.

Smith, Alfred., 1964, "The Dionysian Innovation." American Anthropologist 66: 251-265.

Snyder, P., 1974, "Curriculum for One World." Learning 2(9): 50-51.

Stone, Frank., 1975, Armenian Studies for Secondary Students. Storrs, Ct.: Parousia Press.

_____., 1975, The Irish: In Their Homeland, In America, In Connecticut. Storrs, Ct.: Parousia Press.

_____., 1978, Scots and Scotch Irish In Connecticut. Storrs, Ct.: World Education Project, University of Connecticut.

Trice, H. M., 1970, " The 'Outsider's' Role in Field Study." In William Filstead, ed., Qualitative Methodology: Firsthand Involvement With the Social World. Chicago: Markham Publishing Co.

Tushman, Michael., 1977, "Special Boundary Roles in the Innovative Process." Administrative Science Quarterly 22: 587-605.

Weibust, Patricia, Gennaro Capobianco and Sally Gould., 1976, The Italians: In Their Homeland, In America, In Connecticut. Storrs, Ct.: Parousia Press.

Weibust, Patricia., 1977, "Teachers' Manual, Multicultural Ethnic Heritage Series." Storrs, Ct.: World Education Project, University of Connecticut.

Wolcott. Harry., 1971, "Handle With Care: Necessary Precautions in the Anthropology of Schools." In Murray Wax, Stanley Diamond and Fred Gearing, eds., Anthropological Perspectives on Education. New York: Basic Books.